1: Hocart/Y-5 (ca. 1920) 1929

OQ6 Lau OQ6
Lakemba

INDUSTRIES

AGRICULTURE

Yam Growing

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Yam planting was formerly done by "clan statute labor." One field would be planted by the village (*vere vakoro*), one by each clan, one by each group of households (*vakavuvale*). For the field of Tui Naiau the whole of Lakemba joined in. If Navuaira did the digging, Natokalau would provide the food while their women got together manufactured articles for a race; or, vice versa. The digging party ran a race for the gifts, though without material reward, for the runners then went home and provided yams to plant; one, a person. The nobles had their field planted by one or two villages, their dependencies. The owner of the field made a feast (*otho* or *ngga ni laulau*) at various stages of the work. When the crops were mature, first fruits were ceremoniously offered.

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Yams (*uvi*) are the staple food of Lau (Pl. II, *B*). The soil of Lakemba is especially suited to their cultivation. There are many kinds, identified by their shape and by the texture and color of the skin. The true indigenous yams of Lakemba are said to be the *kaumaile*, the *kasokaso*, and true *ndamuni*. The *kaumaile* is recognized as the longest yam and has many varieties—white (*kumaile vula*, *kaumaile hina*), the longest and best flavored; *kaumaile uli*, red inside, very stout; "the root of the breadfruit," long head and yellow flesh, color of head uneven. The *kasokaso*, recognized as the best flavored, and next in length to *kaumaile*, is noble (*turanga*). The varieties are: *wanu*, some rivalling the *kaumaile* in length and so sturdy that it sometimes flowers when the tuber is large and only when the plant is a good size; *tawake*, the next longest, has a small head; *lavelio* also called *maikeli* after Maikeli Mbaleingau of Levuka, a noted planter; the German *kasokaso*, said to be the same as the *lavelio* and to have been imported, two varieties, one white and thick with pale leaves; the other one is the longer.

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A Lauan says:

Dry and breezy soil is good for yams. Damp land is bad because of the breath of the water. It is bad if it is shut in because bad heat is in bad repute (*rongo tha*) with yams; the breath of the soil goes up, so it is either cold or excessively hot; cold is bad when it alternates with heat. Wet soil is bad because it is cold. Yams do well in hard soil; if they strike alluvial soil it is soft and cold. Soils differ according to the year. In a dry year true soil (*nggele ndina*) is best; but in a wet year yams do better in *rasca*, a reddish strong soil of which there is much near Tarukua. Shallow soil is fertile if rain falls; not so deep soil, possibly because of the cold; on

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the other hand, shallow soil with soapstone underneath as in Ndevo, Naiau, is no good in a dry year. Various soils suit various yams; thus in Rasea some places are good for short yams, others for long; yams from Rasea have a nice taste.

Land is cleared from April till June, beginning with the following of the reeds; these months are called clearing months (*vula i wercwere*). As yam fallows bear little besides reeds, all that is usually required is roughly to cut and beat down the reeds and fire them, taking care to clear thoroughly a broad avenue all round to prevent the fire from spreading; however, it frequently does spread, but usually spends itself on barren tracts. When the remaining stumps have been cleared away the digging begins.

Digging is done with a digging stick (*i ndoko*), a pole 5 to 7 feet long, levelled at one end. Thomson (14, p. 339) says it "does little credit to the inventive powers of the Fijians." I have experience of yam planting and can say that the digging stick is far better adapted to yam planting than a spade; in fact Lakembans object to spades because the soil is full of roots, and forks bend and do not have the leverage of a yam pole. That is why the Fijian, who is neither a fool nor stupidly conservative, keeps to his digging stick, unless he can get what he calls a German (*tiamani*), a narrow oval blade in a straight line with the dowel, which he fixes on the end of a digging stick.

Sometimes the whole soil is turned over, a process called *thuki vovo*; it is supposed sometimes to do the yams good. In Ono an experiment was made of turning up only part of a field, it was found that the yams were energetic in the soil that was not turned. The reason is that if the soil is turned the spaces between the mounds are hot in the sun, and cold in the rain.

As a rule planters are content with making mounds in the undug field. This work which is called *ndoko* is done by the young men because it is harder; they thrust the stick into the ground and lever up the earth; then they thrust it in the next spot and so on in a circle some two and a half feet or more in diameter. The older men break up the clods and gather the earth into a mound with their hands or with spades, an operation called *rava*. The mounds, *i pukepuke* are usually made on one day and the planting done on another day.

The chief months for yam planting are July and August; some kinds can be planted later, and planting goes on, decreasing in intensity, as late as November. Old men used to advise planting at full moon; then the yams would grow big. Seed yams are called *mbulambula*, from *mbula*, to grow; when planted, they are called *i tei* (set). Any part of the yam may be planted, but usually the heads (*ta ulu*) are kept for the purpose. If the whole yams are used, they are cut into two or more parts. If a long

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as a surprise. To guard against witchcraft red *rewa* (*rewandamu*) and horse taro are planted on the borders of the field. In Lomaloma *lata* is planted against "raw eyes"; if a person with "raw eyes" sees yams they will not grow well.

A yam field should not be visited after rain, the reason being if legs or hands touch the leaves when wet, they will become *karatha* because water remains in yam leaves. Leaves, when *karatha*, look burnt, fade, and drop.

The crop depends on the weather. If there is too much rain the ground is cold so that the yams do not penetrate far. If there is sunshine till Christmas the interior of the pit is warm and the yams do well. If there is a prolonged drought, yams that are planted early do not come to much because the sun eats up their strength; the yams planted later retain their strength.

When Orion is in the west the yams are mature. Early yams come in in January if there is plenty of rain; but they are few. As the last year's stock is exhausted the young men are sometimes sent to the fields in January to get immature yams for feasts. They dig them up when the bottom is still white, cut it off, leaving about one hand's length and cover up the heads again; these heads produce long yams that very same season. This process is called *vakarete*. The bulk of the crop comes in about March and April, months known as digging months (*vula ikelikeli*). First yams for immediate needs are dug. When the yams have definitely ceased growing they are stored in little huts next to the plantation and called *lolo*.

Sometimes yams are planted two years running in the same field. This is called *lothi*. In that case they must be planted in June or July. They do not yield much. Usually yams are succeeded by sweet potatoes, bananas, or some other crop. Sometimes bananas are planted in a field of yams immediately after the yams have been put in; being small, the trees do not injure the yams. After sweet potatoes or other crops the land is allowed to lie fallow (*voavoa*).

Wild yams are called *tikau* and are eaten, except the poisonous kind.

Sweet yams (*Dioscurea aculeata*) are called *kawai*. They are not planted in Lakemba and are not esteemed. They are abundant in the bush and people sometimes come from the Southern Islands and beg leave to dig them up. They are generally fibrous and not to be compared to those cultivated.

Taro Planting

Taro is not planted on so large a scale as are yams, but is more esteemed. Only wet taro fields are cultivated in Lau, and these by irrigation along the streams. Such land is called *solove*. Swiftly running streams are most